

FACT SHEET: FORCED EVICTIONS IN CAMBODIA

Snapshot: This fact sheet builds upon previous fact sheet released by CCHR in 2020 and 2021, and mostly focuses on forced evictions in Cambodia since the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in late 2021. Despite a titling drive that saw the issuing of nearly 7 million land titles in recent years, forced evictions continue to be carried out in blatant disregard for the human rights of evicted citizens. This fact sheet recalls the human rights obligations requiring both States and businesses to protect citizens against forced evictions, and provides tangible recommendations to the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”) to tackle this issue and protect its citizens’ housing and land rights.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the RGC has granted large swathes of land for development and exploitation to domestic and international companies. Due to the country’s fractured land registration system, lack of formal tenure security, and weak rule of law, this has led to a **dramatic increase in land disputes**. While there is no official data available on forced evictions, it was estimated that **approximately 400,000 Cambodians** were forcibly evicted between 2003 and 2012,¹ with numbers now expected to be much higher. A 2020 report from Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT) showed that **nearly 10,000 families (roughly 40,000 people)** had been evicted without due process since the 1980s in Phnom Penh alone.² Previous fact sheets published by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) in 2020 and 2021 showed that **forced evictions continued during the COVID-19 pandemic**,³ despite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing’s call for a global moratorium on evictions during that period.⁴

Forced evictions are among the **most pervasive land rights violations** as they often force individuals into homelessness or impede the victims from earning a livelihood. They **intensify existing inequalities**, and invariably **affect poor and marginalized communities**, pushing the most vulnerable further into poverty. CCHR has documented more cases of forced evictions since the RGC lifted COVID-19 restrictions in late 2021. This is particularly worrisome, given that vulnerable and poor households - which have traditionally been the main victims of forced evictions - have borne the brunt of rising inflationary pressure in 2022.⁵ This fact sheet will recall the human rights obligations that require both States and businesses to protect individuals and communities against forced evictions. It will also look at recent examples of forced evictions in Cambodia, and provide tangible recommendations to the RGC to improve respect for land and housing rights and protect against forced evictions in the country.

¹ Faine Greenwood, “Cambodia evictions continue unchecked.” ([Global Post](#), 22 January 2012).

² Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (“STT”), “[Eviction and Relocation](#).” (June 2020).

³ CCHR, factsheet: [Force Eviction in Cambodia](#) (October 2020).

⁴ OHCHR, ‘[Ban evictions during COVID-19 pandemic, UN expert urges](#).’ 18 August 2020.

⁵ World Bank, ‘[Cambodia Economic Update](#).’ June 2022, page 1.

a. Definition

What are forced evictions?

A forced eviction is the “**permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection.**”

Committee on Social and Cultural Rights, (General comment No 7, E/1998/22, 1997)

Forced evictions constitute a gross violation of human rights law that particularly violates the right to adequate housing, as well as broad range of other internationally recognized rights, including the right to security of person, and the rights of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands and territories.⁶ Under international law, forced evictions are only permissible in very limited and narrow circumstances, and **must be fully justifiable and authorized by law**. Full **legal recourse and remedies** must also be available to those affected.⁷

It is the **responsibility of the State to protect against forced evictions**, and to ensure evictions are permissible under human rights law and are carried out in the appropriate manner. This includes considering alternatives, following due process, and **respecting the rights to information, meaningful consultation and free and prior informed consent** of affected citizens. The State must also take all necessary steps to **minimize the impact of evictions** to ensure that they do not result in homelessness,⁸ and to ensure that evicted citizens are provided with **adequate compensation** in advance and appropriate remedies.⁹

States are also required to protect against forced evictions carried out by third parties; while **businesses are under an obligation to respect human rights**, including to not forcibly evict individuals.¹⁰ It is also important to recall that protection against forced evictions is **not dependent on a person’s land tenure status**, and extends to **all individuals**, including those living in informal settlements, in rural areas, and renters.¹¹

b. Legal framework

Protections against forced evictions are enshrined in **legally binding treaties ratified by Cambodia**, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ICESCR”) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”).¹²

⁶ OHCHR, “Forced Evictions Factsheet No. 25/Rev 1.” ([OHCHR](#), 2015), p 5.

⁷ ICESCR, “General comment No.7 on the right to adequate housing:forced evictions.” ([ICESCR](#), 1997), UN Doc E/1998/22, para. 11.

⁸ *Ibid*, para. 16.

⁹ For examples of appropriate remedies, see OHCHR, “Land and Human Rights Standards and Applications.” ([OHCHR](#), 2015), p. 29.

¹⁰ [OHCHR](#), “Land and Human Rights Standards and Applications”, (n 6) p. 81.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹² For more information on the human rights and obligations of states under international law pertaining to forced evictions, please see Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, “Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement” ([OHCHR](#), 2007) UN Doc A/HRC/4/18.

ICESCR Article 11

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the **right of everyone to an adequate standard of living** for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and **housing**, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”

ICCPR Article 17:

“No one shall be subjected to **arbitrary or unlawful interference** with his privacy, family, **home** or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.”

These human rights treaties are **incorporated directly into Cambodian legislation** through Article 31 of the Constitution. Cambodian law also provides for numerous protections against forced evictions. The Constitution and the Land Law 2001 both provide that **land/property expropriation can only occur in the public interest, with the requirement that *fair and just compensation be paid in advance***.¹³ The Land Law further provides possession rights and rights to request land title in certain circumstances,¹⁴ and contains **provisions protecting against forced eviction of private owners and occupants**.¹⁵ The 2010 Law on Expropriation also outlines requirements for **fair compensation**.

In 2002, the RGC committed to “clarify and record ownership and other rights [...] in order to **strengthen land tenure security**, improve the efficiency and reliability of land markets, and protect social harmony by preventing or resolving land disputes.”¹⁶ The RGC has also developed legal, policy, and institutional frameworks to implement the 2001 Land Law. These frameworks recognize and provide for **important safeguards** to protect the land tenure, as well as possession and ownership rights of Cambodian citizens, including protection against forced evictions. Under these policies, **forced evictions are illegal and resettlement can only be undertaken as a measure of last resort**.¹⁷

2. Recent cases of forced evictions in Cambodia

Forced evictions have shown no sign of abating since the country lifted COVID-19 restrictions in late 2021 despite a recent titling drive that saw the RGC issue nearly 6.9 million land titles (as of June 2023, out of an overall objective of 7 million by late 2023).¹⁸ Although indigenous people have been historically impacted by forced evictions due to the granting of economic land concessions and encroachment on their traditional lands by economic actors, little progress has been made in providing them with collective land titles (CLTs). As of June 2023, only 40 out of Cambodia’s 458 indigenous communities had received CLTs.¹⁹ According to estimates, this

¹³ The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia 1993, Article 44, See also: Land Law 2001, Art 5.

¹⁴ For example, Art 30 of the Land Law 2001 provides rights to request definitive land title for those who have had peaceful, undisputed occupation of land or housing for more than five years prior to the promulgation of the law.

¹⁵ See Land Law 2001, article 254.

¹⁶ “Eviction and Resettlement in Cambodia, Human Costs, Impacts and Solutions” (OHCHR 2012), page 2.

¹⁷ This principle was reiterated by His Excellency Mr. Im Chhun Lim, the Senior Minister in charge of the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, when he received the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, on 29 October 2010. OHCHR, “Eviction and Resettlement in Cambodia, Human Costs, Impacts and Solution.” 2012, page 2.

¹⁸ According to official government figures, see [here](#) for the source in Khmer, page 7.

¹⁹ CCHR, “[Access to Collective Land Titles for Indigenous Communities in Cambodia-2023 Update](#).” (August 2023).

leaves some 164,541 indigenous people at risk of forced evictions.²⁰

From March 2020 to August 2023, CCHR’s Business and Human Rights Project registered a total of 22 media articles related to cases of forced evictions. These involved approximately 13,111 families who were evicted or facing eviction in eleven provinces (Phnom Penh, Kandal, Kampong Speu, Koh Kong, Phreah Sihanouk, Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Ratanakiri, and Mondulakiri). Based on the size of the average Cambodian household, this could amount to over 57,032 people in total.²¹ The recent forced evictions recorded by CCHR have been marked by the **use of force, threats or intimidation, the destruction of houses and farmlands without prior notice** by officials or private companies, **inadequate compensation packages**, and a general **lack of consultation** with the communities affected. The main victims were **members of poor urban communities, farmers and vulnerable groups**, including indigenous communities.



a. Thousands of Siem Reap families evicted from Angkor Archeological Park

From November 2022, around 6,000 families had to relocate from their homes near Angkor Wat to Banteay Srei district’s Run Ta Ek Commune, some 30 kilometers away.²² The move is part of an effort to clear settlements that the RGC say damage the environments and could harm the temple’s World Heritage status. Officials were quoted in April 2023 as saying that approximately 10,000 families had ‘volunteered’ to relocate,²³ but research published by Amnesty International in March 2023 suggested that they felt coerced to leave.²⁴ This was also confirmed by local media reports.²⁵ Amnesty revealed a lack of “notice prior to evictions, and genuine consultation with the affected communities on the eviction and resettlement process.”²⁶ Many of the families sent to Run Ta Ek have had to build and partially fund their home construction, and now struggle to maintain their livelihoods.²⁷ On 10 September 2023, Amnesty said these ‘mass forced evictions’ were ‘leading to increased indebtedness and impoverishment for many.’²⁸

In some cases, the RGC allocated land that had traditionally been used by local communities to accommodate Angkor evictees, including 514 hectares in three villages of Angkor Thom district’s Peak Sneng commune. Around 200 people from one of these villages were offered smaller plots at unspecified locations in compensation for losing some of their agricultural land. They were reportedly told that they would not get anything if they refused the offer.²⁹ On 17 November 2022, a village chief in Prasat Bakorng district’s Balaing commune was removed

²⁰ This calculation was based on: Ministry of Planning and Rural Development, “[Report on the Demographic, Social and Economic Situation of Indigenous Peoples of Cambodia](#).” 2021, page 72 and xii; Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, “[Outcome report](#).” June 2023, page 7.

²¹ This calculation was based on an official clarification made by then Senior Minister of Planning H.E. Chhay Than on 9 February 2023. See this article from APSARA Media Services for more details [\[in Khmer\]](#).

²² CamboJA Staff, “No Choice: Forced Angkor Evictions Portrayed as Voluntary to UNESCO.” ([CamboJA News](#), 4 April 2023).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Amnesty International, ‘[Cambodia: Halt ‘mass forced evictions’ at World Heritage site Angkor Wat.](#)’ (31 March 2023)

²⁵ CamboJA Staff, *Op. Cit.*

²⁶ Amnesty International, *Op. Cit.*

²⁷ CamboJA Staff, *Op. Cit.*

²⁸ Amnesty International, “[Cambodia: World Heritage Committee must not ignore ‘mass forced evictions’ around Angkor Wat.](#)” (10 September 2023)

²⁹ CamboJA Staff, *Op. Cit.*

from his position after attempting to join a protest organized by over 200 Run Ta Ek families to contest the use of their former farms to resettle Angkor evictees.³⁰



b. Hundreds of Phnom Penh families living on state-owned land forced to relocate

In a September 2023 report, STT noted that there were a total of 191 **urban poor settlements** in Phnom Penh, down from 277 in 2017. Nearly 70% of these settlements said they did not have formal land documentation, which makes them particularly vulnerable to forced evictions. Fifty-six urban poor settlements (29% of the total) reported facing eviction and or pressure to relocate, up from 41 in 2017. STT said this increased pressure was the result of government policies that prioritize giving away parcels of public land to private companies and individuals. It also added that less than a quarter of the settlements facing eviction had been formally notified.³¹

On 28 Feb 2022, the Prek Pnov district authorities dismantled the houses of 11 families residing on the shores of **Boeung Tamok lake** after they refused compensation packages offered by the government to relocate. Residents also reported that 12 local families had accepted the compensation out of fear and intimidation by the authorities.³² The infilling of Boeung Tamok, Phnom Penh's biggest natural lake, for real estate development purposes had already led to the eviction of hundreds of families as of late 2022. A further 250 families - roughly 1,200 people - are still facing eviction.³³

Still in July 2022, more than 300 families living in **Russey Keo district** received eviction notices ordering them to vacate their homes located on state-owned land to make way for a city-improvement project. In the months that followed, authorities pressured them to leave by threatening arrest and beginning to demolish their houses without consent.³⁴ Residents reported being warned that they were illegally living on state land in the past, but said they could not afford to move.³⁵ Although they received compensation offers ranging from USD 250 to 750, negotiations for higher amounts were unsuccessful.³⁶ Eventually, the vast majority had no choice but to reluctantly relocate to Prek Pnov district's Samraong commune, some 10 kilometers away. In September 2022, the RGC signed a sub-decree by which some 12.98 hectares of land these people used to reside on was awarded to a private company.³⁷



c. Construction of new international airport in Kandal Province

³⁰ Khut Sokun, "Village Chief Fired After Participating in Angkor Relocation Site Protest." (*Voice of Democracy*, 17 November 2022)

³¹ STT, "[The Phnom Penh Survey in 2023 - A Study on Urban Poor Settlements in Phnom Penh](#)." (September 2023)

³² Teng Yalizory, "Authorities Evict Lakeside Residents of Boeung Tamok." (*Cambodianess*, 28 February 2022)

³³ Fiona Kelliher and Mech Dara, "Why do we have no rights?": Phnom Penh lake community make a last stand against developers." (*Guardian*, 8 November 2022).

³⁴ Neang Sokunthea, "Private Company Receives Nearly 13 Hectares of Riverside Property, More than 300 Families Face Eviction." (*CamboJA News*, 16 March 2023).

³⁵ Ngay Nai, "Forced evictions begin for Tonle Sap residents." (*CamboJA News*, 20 July 2022)

³⁶ Roun Ry, "Russei Keo Riverside Families Want Fair Compensation to Leave." (*VOD*, 21 July 2022)

³⁷ Neang Sokunthea, "Private Company Receives Nearly 13 Hectares of Riverside Property, More than 300 Families Face Eviction." (*CamboJA News*, 16 March 2023)

The construction of an international airport in Kandal Province, which began in 2019, is expected to result in the displacement of over 400 families in Kandal and Takeo provinces.³⁸ Overseas Cambodia Investment Corp (OCIC), the company in charge of the project, offered a compensation of USD 8 per square meter to the affected communities; amounting to merely one-tenth of the market rate. However, some families have rejected this offer as too low.³⁹ On 9 February 2022, several excavators were nonetheless deployed to clear rice fields and wetlands belonging to local villagers in Kandal Stung district's Boeung Khyang commune. The district governor dispatched police and military officials to the site, stating the necessity to prevent any altercation and to ensure that the instructions provided by local authorities to carry out the work are implemented.⁴⁰

On 8 April 2022, OCIC began clearing farmland without notice in Takhmao to make way for road construction despite an unresolved land dispute with six local families. The clearing was paused after the local authorities intervened and gave residents a few more days for negotiations.⁴¹ On 19 April 2023, it was reported that OCIC had started directly negotiating with some of the more than 60 families in Kampong Talong village still holding out for greater compensation.⁴² On 24 April 2023, more than 500 families from four villages in Kandal Stung district's Kandok commune and Takmao's Kampong Samnanh petitioned the provincial governor, requesting authorities grant them land titles and the right to continue living on their land. One resident reported that she refused to relocate because it would make her family poorer.⁴³

Other examples recorded by CCHR since 2022 include:⁴⁴

22 February 2022 - Kampong Speu: Soldiers fired warning shots and physically assaulted villagers who were trying to prevent the clearing of a disputed forest in Aoral district's Trapeang Chour commune, leaving three residents injured. This forested land, which is part of the Oral Wildlife Sanctuary, was granted to the military in 2021 for clearance and settlement by military families. No prior notice was provided to the 253 local families affected by the decision. A local villager said officials threatened to shoot anyone who protested the clearing of the area. Soldiers reportedly beat another resident in March 2022, and fired warning shots at Monk Prom Thomacheat, the co-founder of the banished Mother Nature Cambodia environmental group.⁴⁵

16 March 2022 – Preah Vihear: Local authorities forcibly evicted around 300 families, many of whom are Kuy indigenous people, in Kulen district, claiming that the residents were living on state land. Since 2012, he families have been embroiled in a land dispute with Hengfy Group Sugar Industry, a Chinese sugar company that was

³⁸ Sorn Sarath, "Kandal Families Slated for Eviction from Airport Site Renew Requests for Land Titles." ([CamboJA News](#), 8 February 2023)

³⁹ Sorn Sarath, "Development of mega-airport continues, despite opposition by locals." ([CamboJA News](#), 12 March 2022)

⁴⁰ Khuon Narim, "Villagers' lands cleared for mega-airport project despite ongoing disputes." ([CamboJA News](#), 10 February 2022)

⁴¹ Sorn Sarath, "New airport developer begins clearing farmland, though compensation hasn't been finalized." ([CamboJA News](#), 10 April 2022)

⁴² Sorn Sarath, Runn Sreydeth, "Kandal Airport Developer Begins Direct Negotiations with Households Seeking Better Compensation." ([CamboJA News](#), 19 April 2023)

⁴³ Sorn Sarath, Runn Sreydeth, "500 Kandal Families Petition Authorities to Halt Evictions for Airport Development." ([CamboJA News](#), 24 April 2023)

⁴⁴ The list of cases provided in this fact sheet is not an exhaustive list of the cases recorded by CCHR since 2022.

⁴⁵ Mech Dara and Andrew Haffner, "Soldiers Assault Villagers in Disputed Kampong Speu Forest, Says Rights Group." ([VOD](#), 23 February 2022); LICADHO, "[Flash Info | Land Community Activists Beaten by Brigade 70 Soldiers in Kampong Speu.](#)" (23 February 2022); Meng Kroypunlok, "Soldiers Accused of Firing Warning Shots at Forest Monk." ([VOD](#), 14 April 2022)

granted an economic land concession of over 40,000 hectares in the area. The families have attempted to seek a resolution but were ignored by local authorities. They were eventually forced to move to another part of the forest because they had nowhere else to live.⁴⁶

8 May 2022 - Ratanakiri: Rubber company 7 Makara Phary started clearing farmland that was being cultivated by nine Jarai indigenous families in Nhang commune. The company destroyed trees, crops, and blocked access to the land without prior notice. A resident said the families had been using the area for around three years, but Nhang commune's chief pointed out that their farms were inside company land.⁴⁷ On 23 May 2023, it was reported that residents had been pressured to sell their land for less than one quarter of the market price, and told that their lands would be seized regardless of their consent. According to village officials, 7 Makara Phary had cleared the lands of at least six villagers without any contract being signed between December 2022 and May 2023. Residents also reported facing threats and intimidation from armed Makara Phary workers.⁴⁸

25 June 2022 - Kandal: Authorities began clearing farmland belonging to around 40 families from three villages in Khsach Kandal district's Svay Romiet commune without prior notice to allow the Ministry of Water Resources to build a canal and dirt road. The families were offered no compensation, even though several residents said they had to go into debt to buy the land.⁴⁹

14 July 2022 - Preah Vihear: Around 40 residents in Kulen district's Srayong and Phnom Tbeng II communes protested after the provincial authorities said they would clear their houses and farms, which are located on land that was granted to agrobusiness company Seladamex Co., Ltd in March 2011. In March 2022, provincial authorities had already razed 60 houses and cleared about 450 hectares of crops without notice, forcing the affected families to move into tents. No compensation was provided, and community members were also threatened with arrest if they dared to protest or take photos. A total of 131 families that have been living on the land since 2012 could eventually be evicted.⁵⁰

25 August 2022 - Preah Sihanouk: Authorities reportedly demolished around 200 huts in the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and threatened to arrest those who stayed and protested. Provincial officials said the huts were built on privately owned land, and noted that the authorities had already asked their owners to leave the area in 2021. They denied destroying the huts or threatening their owners with arrest, saying the residents had volunteered to return the land to the company and leave the site. Residents said they came from different provinces in recent years. They believed they were living on state and would eventually be allocated a plot.⁵¹

9 September 2023 - Mondulokiri: It was reported that influential brokers dressed as soldiers and armed with guns

⁴⁶ Seoung Nimol, "Road block for Preah Vihear villagers petitioning decade-old land dispute." ([CamboJA News](#), 19 March 2022); Son Minea, "Eviction of 300 families from state land deemed legal." ([Khmer Times](#), 30 March 2022); Khuth Sokun, Khleang Kim Houy, "Preah Vihear provincial authorities ban citizens from entering disputed land." [in Khmer] ([VOD](#), 24 March 2022)

⁴⁷ Roun Ry, "Jarai Families Say Farms Destroyed by Rubber Plantation." ([VOD](#), 23 June 2022)

⁴⁸ Jack Brook, Eung Sea, "Threats, Destruction and Forced Sales: Rubber Firm Razes Indigenous Jarai Farmlands." ([CamboJA News](#), 23 May 2023)

⁴⁹ Khut Sokun, Meng Kroypunlok, "Gov't Clears Kandal Residents' Land for Canal, Road." ([VOD](#), 5 July 2022)

⁵⁰ Khut Sokun, "131 Preah Vihear Families Fear Eviction After Crops Razed." ([VOD](#), 15 July 2022)

⁵¹ Sorn Sarath, "Sihanoukville residents evicted after four charged with encroaching private land." ([CamboJA News](#), 29 August 2022)

were encroaching on indigenous Thmon community forests in Kaok Nheaek district. The brokers reportedly encroached on, privatized, or sold hundreds of hectares of community forests and protected areas, claiming they had land titles granting them ownership over the community's ancestral lands. They also fired three shots at community members who were patrolling to prevent the cutting of trees. The local community reported the case to the provincial authorities, but the matter has yet to be resolved.⁵²

3. Conclusion & Recommendations

Forced evictions constitute a **gross deprivation of human rights** and have been continuing at **alarming rates** in Cambodia since the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. It is crucial that the RGC addresses the issues outlined above to protect its citizens' right to land and adequate housing.



To that end, CCHR makes the following recommendations to the RGC:

Recommendation 1: Immediately **halt all pending evictions** until compensation and resettlement measures that are **agreeable to the communities affected** can be negotiated;

Recommendation 2: Urgently **initiate a transparent review** of all the cases of forced evictions that occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic, and take the necessary measures to **effectively remedy any instances of human rights violations** or **unfair compensation** identified during this process;

Recommendation 3: Halt approval of further economic concessions, development projects, and expansion of protected areas until the **boundaries of indigenous customary lands have been clearly demarcated** and approved by local indigenous communities and allocate a national budget and the necessary human resources to **speed up the CLT registration process** with the objective of issuing at least 10 CLTs per year from 2025 onwards, in line with previous RGC's commitments;

Recommendation 4: Ensure that future evictions **comply with relevant international human rights law and standards**, and that: **(1)** evicted families are provided with **adequate compensation** based on the market value of the land they used to occupy or farm, and resettled in areas that offer easy access to basic services and livelihood opportunities; **(2)** evictions are only used as an **absolute last resort**; and **(3)** evictions are never carried out using **excessive or disproportionate force**.

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⁵² Cheat Chamnan, "Indigenous community in Mondulkiri says brokers in military uniforms are encroaching on hectares of community forest." [in Khmer] ([RFA](#), 10 September 2023)